THE

DANCE OF MODERN SOCIETY:

BY

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PREFATORY NOTE.

It is now nearly two years since the most of the following pages appeared as an article in one of our American quarterly reviews. The article immediately attracted attention, and was widely copied and commented on by the periodical press, both religious and secular. As was to have been expected, the comments were sometimes in a friendly and sometimes in a hostile sense. Up to the present time, the writer has continued to receive solicitations, from the most diverse quarters, to issue his essay again, in some such form as should make it accessible to the general public. These suggestions, still persisting after the lapse of so many months, have seemed to be an evidence

that the essay was accepted by a considerable number of minds as a satisfactory expression of opinion on a subject of living social and ethical interest. It is at least a positive expression, and written not in the dialect of any religious sect, but in the universal language of morality.

THE DANCE

OF

MODERN SOCIETY.

I PROPOSE an unusual compliment to the Dance—I propose to discuss it. I cheerfully lend it dignity for the purpose. I pledge myself, besides, to put it permanently beyond the need of borrowing again. For I shall be able, I believe, to vindicate for it a dignity all its own—the dignity of being exceedingly evil—a dignity which, however modestly worn, I think that it possesses in a degree commensurate with the magnitude of its littleness in every other respect.

I purpose, then, to discuss the Dance as practised in modern society. I purpose to discuss it earnestly, but temperately, with strong conviction certainly, but without unreasonable prejudice, and in a manner not to violate the decorum of a sincere personal respect toward those who agree with me in zeal for good morality,

but differ from me in opinion upon the present topic.

I do not, it will be seen, affect the candor either of ingenuous inquiry or of judicial neutrality. Much less do I affect the candor of a merely curious unconcern. I appear as an advocate, and I do not expect, as I shall not attempt, to avoid the vehemence of advocacy. I volunteer my office on behalf of several imperilled interests, all of them valuable, and one at least vital. It is the cause at once of Health, of Economy, of the Social Nature, of Intellectual Improvement, and of Morality, that I defend. I undertake to implead the Dance in their joint behoof as the common and equal enemy of them all.

I shall summon the accused to answer, not at the bar of passion, however holy and religious, and not before the tribunal of Scripture, however clear and authoritative, but rather in the wide and open forum of reason, of conscience, and of common sense. If the Dance can escape conviction here, she shall be welcome for me to make her pirouette, and go tilting out of court,

free to take her chances of living down, as best she may, the ancient and sacred suspicion against her, which still survives in that one safe sanctuary left for a badgered and brow-beaten morality ready to be ashamed of itself—the inviolate bosom of the Christian church.

The conscience and the sentiment of the American community produce a tolerably uniform annual crop of discourses and of newspaper articles on this favorite social amusement—"social amusement"—it would be hard to deny it the name by which, with a Mephistophelian sort of pleasantry suspiciously its own, the dance has succeeded in getting itself currently called. But beyond a chance sermon or so, each year, that attains to the temporary apotheosis of print, I am not aware that anything in the form of a book has yet treated exclusively of a subject which, what with the talk that it occasions, and the talk that it supersedes, displaces more conversation in so-called society than perhaps any other topic of human interest in the world.

Here, then, is the phenomenon of a social in-

stitution that has grown to a really overshadowing greatness among us almost unperceived, simply by the policy of maintaining always, with a persistent laugh, that it was quite too small to merit a serious word. I have a serious word, notwithstanding, to say, and I am willing to compromise the dignity of authorship, in the judgment of any who may think that I do so, by saying it in a little book.

The subject of amusement at large, it would not comport with the simplicity of my present purpose to discuss. But a remark or two in passing will not be irrelevant.

It is an ill augury for a Christian age to be spending much brain and breath upon the question how to amuse itself. Upon the whole, it is a pagan question; and paganism itself has already declined from its heroic virtue before it condescends to entertain it. But if Christian teachers allow themselves to be caught with this wile of the devil, and submit to waste their earnestness in pitiful casuistry upon points of what? and when? and where? and how much? and how? in the art of amusement, whence, one

might implore to know, are we to hope for the voice that shall re-animate an abject and oblivious age? If the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.

The truth is, the most of those who clamor so unappeasably for amusement are precisely that class of persons who need amusement least. They are the cloyed, the sated, sons and daughters of pleasure, those who feel the "fullness of satiety"—who sigh, like the Eastern prince, for a fresh sensation, and languidly offer a prize for a new device of diversion. These jaded voluptuaries need nothing so little as amusement. What they do need is the bracing tonic regimen of wholesome, honest, useful work—such as the teeming dispensary of Providence is never at a loss to supply. They might well mistake the thrill of unaccustomed and unexpected delight which would go through their lax nerves with a few strokes of vigorous work in some good cause, not in their own, for that novel and delicious tingle of pleasure which they had been awaiting and

invoking so long. How crass the folly of trying to satisfy these morbid seekers after amusement by giving them what they crave!

And yet there is a cry from some quarters, and a cry that upon the whole seems likely to grow, summoning the Young Men's Christian Associations of the country to enter the field of competition to purvey amusement for this class of minds. It will prove to be a hazardous career of experiment. The plan would be to enrich the variety of entertainment that now invites the young to an evening of rational enjoyment in their hospitable rooms, by adding facilities for games, such as backgammon, draughts, chess, billiards. It is most earnestly to be hoped that whenever this experiment is tried, it may be tried under auspices that shall be at once in the highest degree favorable for its success, if it ought to succeed, and in the highest degree safe for guarding the consequences of failure, if it is destined to fail. It is creditable to the good sense which has always prevailed, to a singular extent, in the counsels of these bodies that they have hitherto decisively resisted the

urgency that has impelled them in the new direction. Meantime it will be manifest wisdom for organizations consciously less experienced to await the result of some better-appointed experiment, in so doubtful a case, than their own could possibly be. It is difficult to conceive of any practical administration of such a plan that could make it successful. The theory of it I believe is a false theory; but if the theory of it were true, the practical realization of the theory is beset with innumerable, and, in my opinion, quite insurmountable, difficulties. Our sentimental times mistake in supposing that evil can be induced to shade off into good by insensible degrees. You can never make the transition from sinful pleasure to innocent pleasure anything less than a violent transition. The ease of transition is all the other way. It will be found fearfully practicable to educate country boys to love the billiard-table, and to cast the mother's tearful warning against it behind their backs, in the conceit of a more modern Christian wisdom to be had in the city. It will be found easy to give country boys so much practice

with cue and ball as shall take away their guardian shame of accepting some farther-developed acquaintance's invitation to turn into a downstairs billiard-room on the street. This drift of education will prove easy and swift. All the natural forces of a world of evil will assist it. But when the direction is reversed, it will be a different matter. When it comes to decoying away a country boy, that has once got the taste of that strange sweetness under his tongue, from the haunt of pleasure without restraint to the home of pleasure under Christian law—the managers of the Associations I fear will find that it was the sin that gave zest to the pleasure instead of the pleasure that gave zest to the sin. If for every boy enticed to virtue by the bait of mere pleasure, there are not two boys enticed to sin thereby—why, I shall be sincerely rejoiced, and the originator of the plan will deserve the credit of having reïnforced the gospel of Christ with an elemental power of salvation not revealed by its author. Alas! men readily follow lures of pleasure on the way to hell, but they revolt, with an obstinacy that is half perverse-

ness and half honest indignation, against following lures of pleasure to heaven. But this whole subject is one that demands and will receive ample discussion.

The dance is popularly reckoned among amusements. But for this I should not need to waste a word upon the matter of amusement in general. As it is, in finding a quarrel with the dance I shall be held to be waging war against amusement, unless I explain myself in a paragraph or two. Briefly, then, I am not an enemy to amusement. I believe in it. I believe in it heartily. I believe in it so heartily that I would give it a better name—I would call it recreation. But amusement needs no eulogist. It has happened, by the chance concurrence of two conditions having no necessary relation to each other, that the cause of popular amusement has of late enlisted among us a singularly numerous and brilliant literary championship. In the first place, there is a pervasive liberalizing spirit abroad everywhere in our modern American atmosphere, that tends to relax the tone of moral sentiment respecting

all forms of human self-indulgence and material enjoyment. But in the second place, it is an incident of our nineteenth century civilization that we live intensely. Everybody is in a chronic state of hurry. This highly stimulated rate of living takes reprisals upon our vitality, and we vibrate between extremes of abnormal activity and extremes of abnormal exhaustion. In the extremes of exhaustion we desperately implore some sudden restorative. This restorative it is the transitory fashion of our disease just now to imagine that we recognize in amusement. Our men of letters, as the most sensitive children of civilization, are perhaps the severest sufferers by the prevalent unnatural velocity of living. It is but a matter of course that they should most keenly feel the need of an instantaneous remedy for their enormous overdrafts on a too responsive vitality, and should most credulously hail whatever remedy presents itself to their demand.

Now I sympathize vividly with all my literary brethren in the sense of bodily prostration which follows intellectual toil. I know as well

as any what it is to have the omnivorous and insatiable brain suck vigor out of every nerve and muscle, out of every joint and marrow, in the body, and leave the whole man a-quiver with intense and fine exhaustion. I have known this, and with all my literary brethren I have longed for relief, and "trusted any cure." It costs perhaps the most exquisite agony, except the agony of remorse, of which an aspiring mind is capable—to lie still and experience the conscious impotence of power. Is there no secret of eternal youth for the eager brain, that, with a grief to which the fabled grief of Alexander was a vulgar emotion, is compelled to sink helplessly on the hither side of an unconquered world, which it yet feels to be inalienably its own, although by right of a conquest never to be accomplished? It is not an ignoble errantry that wanders in quest of such a prize.

But I am profoundly convinced that the bent toward 'amusement,' or 'recreation,' or 'muscular development,' call it what you will, that distinguishes the current decade, is a wrong bent—a monstrous moral and physical blunder.

It is both a whimsical and a pathetic sign of the times to read the glowing ascriptions to 'muscle' with which periodical literature has lately been illustrated from the pens of writers whose own muscle had been fairly eaten up by their brains. It is perfectly manifest that the prevailing literary humor, with respect to amusement, is a sanguine hope that amusement may prove to be the long-sought medicine, which shall be able to repair the havoc done to the body by the starved brain in its voracious forages for food.

To be sure, as regards the athletic forms of amusement, literary men are not long in finding out from experience that muscular activity and cerebral activity are implacable mutual enemies. There is no better wisdom on this subject than that which Hawthorne derived from his share in the Brook Farm experiment. The reader will find it set down in the "Blithedale Romance." Hawthorne found that Arcadia and Attica were very distinct provinces. He says that when muscle worked, brain would not. This, I take it, is the invariable experience of

every literary man. The consequence is that the athletic sports, which are praised by men of brain, are practised by men of muscle. Literary men, meanwhile, betake themselves to forms of amusement less arduous to their softened bodily fibre. They patronize the theatre, the opera, the billiard table, and, now and then, the dance.

But they still commit a blunder. Is it recreation, for example, to an editorial writer, to rush from his mental workshop, with the anvil of his brain red-hot under the swift and ceaseless blows of thought, to a place of public entertainment, and there rob sleep of the precious hours before midnight by diverting himself with a spectacle? No doubt such diversion is better for his over-wrought brain than it would be to continue the tension which the change partially relaxes. But manifestly rest is his true medicine. If he must interpose some such transition, by way of opiate to prepare him for sleep, that only shows his need of rest to be the more desperate. When a man has to resort to soporifics so exhausting that it would task an

unbroken vigor of health simply to sustain them with impunity, that man's condition goes far toward resembling the condition of a time-piece whose main-spring has given way just after winding. There is nothing to reserve and regulate his expenditure of vitality. He is continuously and rapidly, he may be helplessly, running down. We are in urgent need of a new literary period. It should be one eulogistic of REST.

Of all the absurd resorts, however, for recreation, the dance is the most exquisitely absurd. I shall hardly escape the charge of Puritanism for saying this—although the very un-Puritanic Thackeray does not hesitate to set a man down for an ass that confesses himself fond of dancing. I should myself select another animal as the proper analogue for such a man. It is not pleasant to be called Puritanic now-a-days. It requires either a strong nerve or a thick skin to incur the epithet. The days of heroic fame, for the Puritans, seems to have passed, and we are taking our revenge upon them now for having been praised so long. They were a grave order of great souls, whose

faults, like their virtues, were on an ample pattern. They undoubtedly went too far in moral severity; but it was a pathway of error in which their following was never likely to be large, since it led only through toil and loss for themselves, if unhappily it did also lead to some discomfort, and even suffering, for others. Their figure in history is large enough, and unique enough, to make them an inviting target for the small archery of the witlings of our gamesome generation. Even Lord Macaulay having lauded them, in a strain of appreciation which at least had the generosity, if it had also the extravagance, of youth in it, in his essay on Milton, afterward recollected himself to puncture them with more than one of his polished stiletto antitheses, in his History of England. Hardly any of those brilliant surprises of style, which constitute at once the strength and the weakness of this great master of composition, has enjoyed a more popular fame than the verbal lasso which he let fly at the Puritans, when he said that they hated bear-baiting, not because it gave pain to the bears, but because it

gave pleasure to the spectators. How many have smiled, with involuntary applause, at this epigrammatic snare for the hapless Puritans, and how few have ever troubled themselves to perceive that the game which it catches is not the Puritans at all, but the epigrammatist himself. For why, pray, should the Puritans have hated bear-baiting, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators? Was not that the demoralizing element in the sport? And were not the Puritans then right, if, as Macaulay says, they hated bear-baiting for the destructive pleasure that it gave to the spectators, rather than for the destructive pain that it gave to the bears. It is seldom that the fowler is more neatly taken in the snare that he lays.*

* Macaulay is at curious pains to show, in a note, that the Puritans were not actuated by compassion for the bears. He cites, in proof, a Puritan document which relates how some bears were seized and shot by the Puritans on the Lord's day, when the sport was at its height. It might, to be sure, be plausibly maintained, against Macaulay, that such a sudden end of the baiting was even a measure of mercy to the poor beasts; but it would be safe to concede to the great historian's need, that the Puritans were not sentimentalists. It was hardly worth his learning to demonstrate it.

Our modern festive wisdom is far too self-complacent. It is not certain, after all, that the Puritans were not nearer the truth than we. Grim earnest is nobler than play run mad. It is even more joyous. It is open to fair doubt whether the Puritans were not a happier race of beings than their jovial descendants. And, in the long run, excessive gravity is not more cruel than excessive levity. Puritan Boston in sixteen hundred and sixty-nine is a less depressing spectacle, to the thoughtful student of history, than is Nouveau Paris in eighteen hundred and sixty-nine.

Thus much of amusement in general—a subject long since copiously enough, but by no means as yet exhaustively, discussed. My present business, however, is with the dance, not as an amusement, but as an existing social institution. For all that I have to say of it, it might as well be serious as sportive. Indeed I expect to succeed in making it far more serious than sportive. I am to enquire into the bearing of the dance upon several important human interests.

In the first place it is hardly necessary to say

that dancing, in itself, is perfectly innocent. No one denies this. It is as harmless to dance as it is to walk, or to run. But the present question is not of dancing in the abstract. Dancing does not exist in the abstract. It exists, like most things, in a certain way. It is of dancing, as thus practised, *in a certain way*, that I am going to speak. I do not restrict my argument or my conclusion to balls or public assemblies. I should waste my zeal. There is happily, as yet, too unanimous a sentiment among sensible people against them—unless the case happens to be that of the quadrennial inauguration ball* or other such assembly, by which it is the barbarian custom still to soil our social purity and signalize some public occasion. Then it is no disgrace if a representative Christian name be on the list of "managers!" And

* It was one of the minor signs betokening a regeneration of manners at our National Capital, on the accession of the present administration, when President Grant, unhappily, as respected that occasion, not Chief Magistrate of the paramount sovereignty of 'society,' suggested to the 'Committee' that the omission of the inauguration ball would be agreeable to him.

neither do I restrict my argument, or my conclusion, to those rythmic gyrations popularly called "round dances." A popular magazine never distinguished for martyrdom to principle, may safely inveigh against these. The argument is merely some degrees stronger, and the conclusion some degrees clearer, against such excessive developments of the primordial idea. When I name the dance (for the sake of being perfectly understood, I may say) I mean the dance as many of the most respectable members of society, including no inconsiderable proportion of accepted Christians, not unfrequently practice it. I am thus frank, not for the sake of seeming bold, but for the sake of being clear. My readers need none of them be at any loss as to just what I mean. I mean the dance as it flourishes in the most proper and reputable circles to-day.

For the sake of perspicuity and convenience I shall pursue the present investigation into the propriety of the dance, under the following general topics. The division will, I trust, be found sufficiently common-place and obvious.

I. The bearing of the dance upon the Health;

II. Its relation to Economy;

III. Its Social Tendency;

IV. Its Influence upon Intellectual Improvement;

V. Its Moral or Religious Aspects.

This order of investigation is not merely mechanical and fortuitous. It will prove to build a cumulative argument, bearing with multiplied power, upon the paramount interest involved, that of morality or religion. The chief sufferer suffers not only its own injury, but also the injury of all the rest.

I. What bearing does the dance, as it exists among us, have upon the health? An amusement ought at least to be harmless in its hygienic effects. If it does not build up, it should certainly not break down. Now the dance, considered apart from its conventional purposes, simply as a physical exercise, might conceivably be so conducted that it would constitute a wholly health-giving pastime. In the open air,

at rational hours of the day, for a rational length of time, scarcely to exceed say an hour, those participating in it being suitably attired to permit the freest play of the lungs — these and other like conditions fulfilled, and the dance, no doubt, might make good a claim to be ranked as a healthful diversion. There would still remain other points of importance to be settled, before its propriety could be unreservedly admitted; but regarded merely with reference to health, the dance might then pass without challenge.

But suppose all these rational conditions reversed. The gymnasium, in the American use of the term, is an establishment expressly devoted to purposes of physical culture by means of physical exercise. What would be thought of a gymnasium that should carpet its floors, and close its windows, that should then announce its hours of exercise as commencing at ten o'clock at night to continue until two or three o'clock in the morning, interrupted by a sumptuous midnight feast, all with an in-door atmosphere, doubly heated and doubly corrupted by fires

and by a dense crowd of jostling guests, redolent of perfumes, met under rigorous demands that their dress should be such as to repress respiration, and to embarrass everything like naturalness and ease of movement? What if, besides, the conditions should be so contrived as to compel the unnaturally heated gymnasts to make their transition to a contrasted atmosphere out-of-doors, exposed in the most sensitive parts of the body, through insufficient clothing, to the risks of rheumatism, neuralgia, colds, catarrhs, consumption? What, I ask, would be thought of a gymnasium that should conduct its exercises on such a plan as this? But is not the parallel suggested, mainly, and with a margin in favor of particular instances, a tolerably fair one?

I repeat that I am not discussing the dance as it might be, but the dance as it is. Those public-spirited and philanthropic individuals, who, inspired with zeal for the morals of society, are at present engaged in the hopeful enterprise of elevating the stage to its true position, as yoke-fellow to the pulpit in the inculcation

of virtue, will scarcely have time after they have finished that task to perform a like service for the dance, in making it what it should be as the handmaid of medicine in advancing the standard of the general health. Otherwise, the two projects are such natural twins they would appropriately be entrusted to the same hands for execution.

We are witnessing, just now, a brilliant revival of the pure drama in our metropolis. A man of genius, and a man of character, as I suppose, the heir of rare ancestral histrionic fame, is doing more than one man has ever been able to do before for the rescue of the stage from the drag of that downward moral and æsthetic gravitation which it has never successfully resisted hitherto. A temple, reared and gifted by his own fortunate and munificent theatrical piety, scenery and appointments unparalleled for splendor, a generous public sympathy with remarkable talent and enterprise, the auxiliar hopes of all cultivated lovers of the spectacle—these compose a set of auspices such as probably will not soon smile on an attempt

to save the drama again. The success already appears to confirm the auspices. The patronage of the new theatre is said to be made up in part of elements that have been fairly won over to the friendly side from the ranks of those previously hostile to the stage. It really looks as if there were some Christians ready at last to use their influence toward the purification of what they have striven in vain to abolish. For this is the flattering hope with which Christian people have long been allured to the countenancing of the theatre. They have been told that by resolutely refusing to attend the theatre, they have, in effect, deprived it of that conservative influence which it was in their power to exert, and which was necessary to keep it from degenerating to the level of its more degraded patrons. Those Christian men who think that they are surely wise, if they are only not extreme, have been tempted to take some such middle ground in respect to the theatre as this. Now, as Webster told Mr. Hayne, if a thing is to be done, an ingenious man can tell how it is to be done. Let us see how the stage is to be

regenerated by Christian patronage of the stage. Managers, of course, conduct their operations with a thrifty eye to the avoidance of deficits at the end of the season. They aim to please their patrons. Christians, therefore, in order to influence theatrical management, must not merely give moral, they must give material, support to the theatre. They must go to the plays. They must go often enough, and in numbers enough, to compose a preponderating proportion of the attendance. Now, the Protestant Christians of New York number, by recent computation, less than seventy-five thousand souls, in a population of a million. Supposing a general agreement among them all that a regular attendance at the theatre was at this juncture the most pressing and most promising method of evangelic effort, they would not then constitute even one-tenth of the numerical patronage which the management would study to please. Rather a slender minority to dictate the character of the representations. But on certain evenings of the week obedience to their Master, in a point where there could be no mis-

taking of His will, would draw them away to their own assemblies for conference, and for prayer that their zeal in purifying the theatre might be successful. On those evenings, what if Satan should put into the heart of the managers that then, at least, there could be no objection to letting down the moral standard to the taste of "the general"—would the gain be great? Or if, for the sake of making their influence more sensible, Christians should concentrate their patronage upon some one theatre, and should succeed in rendering that unexceptionable, is it certain that ten other theatres would not spring up to supply the starving appetite of the populace outnumbering them tenfold for low representations? The purification of the theatre is the merest catchword that ever snared a hopeful and credulous public. It means, at most, but the maintenance of one theatre in a great city, where a high moral and æsthetic standard of representation is observed. That might be a gain to the intellectual facilities of the community, but it would not be one infinitesimal degree of progress toward any substan-

tial moral reform. As a matter of present observation, is not the dramatic revival coincident with a bottomless degradation of the stage?

The close kinship between the subject of the theatre and the subject of the dance, at just this point, makes it no digression to have spoken at such length of the theatre. Christian people, and moral people, and sensible people in general, have been exhorted to smile instead of frowning on the dance, in the assurance that, if they did so, the willful but good-hearted little jade would be charmed quite out of her frolic perverseness, and would settle down into as prim and proper a damsel as any reasonable person could desire. But I suspect that the result of such a well-intended attempt at moral suasion on the dance would be much the same as that sketched for the hypothetical experiment on the theatre. There might be moral plays and there might be moral dances; but it is exceedingly questionable if either moral plays or moral dances would possess that unique aromatic sapor which is requisite in order wholly to satisfy the appetite of the original lovers of

the legitimate articles. It would certainly be one of the most striking spectacles of misguided philanthropy and self-sacrifice, that the world has ever produced, to behold a well-regulated, demure-stepping, devout procession of pastors, elders, deacons, and brethren, with a sprinkling of young converts, filing into Wallack's of an evening, to assist at the purification of the comedy. It would only be equalled by a festive assembly of the like characters striving to smile benign, and yet superior, on the occasion, while, with King David in mind for model, and Herodias' daughter for warning, they glided in Quixotic benevolence through the stately quadrille, blandly hoping thereby to reclaim the dance from the vain world to the pious nurture of the Church.

But it is too serious a matter for irony. There is no other social usage whatever that in my opinion is, directly and indirectly, chargeable with producing more of the ill-health, which, destroying the life-long comfort of our wives, our sisters, and our mothers, is steadily diluting and corrupting, at its source, the blood

of our civilization. The general system of late hours, which has grafted its monstrous absurdity upon our modern social life, is probably traceable to the dance. Viewed from without, the dance is essentially a spectacle, and a spectacle does not love daylight. It naturally seeks a less discriminating and a more suggesting illumination. Or else, from the interior point of view, the dance is a syncope of abandonment to sensuous pleasure; and sensuous pleasure is a dream which cannot "feel the truth and stir of day" without losing something of that delicious self-forgetfulness which is necessary to its perfect bliss. In truth, the dance, raised to a kind of autocracy, has dictated to us in the whole conduct of our social life. It has prescribed midnight hours, tight-lacing, paper-soled shoes—in short, a good number of those hurtful usages which distort the development of modern society. For whatever will serve to heighten the illusion and seductiveness of the dance—whether it be late hours, with the glare of artificial light which they make necessary, small waists, to render the female form as insect-like as possible,

that it may resemble some imaginary sylph, rather than that grand old mother Eve, whom God created for a *wife* to Adam—or whether it be their dress, floating like a fleecy cloud about the person of the wearer—no matter what it be, provided only it will set off the dance—Fashion decrees it and—women adopt it. Thus much for the dance as a matter of health. There will be implications under the concluding division of the subject, that touching morality, which, reflecting their influence backward upon the first, will involve men and women together in physical as well as moral injury from the dance to even a more serious degree. For the dance is not without vital relation to that vice which is now getting discussed afresh in the newspapers under the euphemism of the "Social Cancer." The spirit of fairness of course obliges me to admit that the extravagances named as attaching to the dance are not always carried to eqnal lengths.

II. I am next to consider the dance as it bears upon the matter of Expenditure. This is certainly a subordinate view of the subject, but

it is one nevertheless sufficiently important to deserve a moment's attention. No student of history needs to be reminded that there is a close connection between the sumptuary habits of a people and that people's moral and physical virility. Luxury is implacable foe to longevity, whether of nation or of individual.

The dance, I have said, is, so far as concerns what passes externally, a spectacle. (The chorus of invisible sensations and emotions in the bosoms of the participants, is a spectacle too—to the angels!) It is frequently pleaded for on the ground of its graceful and picturesque effect to the eye. Everything that can contribute to enhance this scenic effect is sought for with eager ingenuity. The more splendid the saloon, the more sumptuous the appointments, the more brilliant the assembly —the greater the social success. Accordingly, no end to the rivalry of ladies in attempting to eclipse each other in the costly display of furniture, of service, of dress, and of jewelry. This barbaric competition in lavishness of expenditure, taking its start from the Tuileries, travels

outward and downward, through every quarter of Christendom, (the unavoidable irony of the word!) and through every grade of society. It tends to impoverish every noble human need to enrich the insatiable shrine of Fashion.

That what I say is true any gossipping letter of social news (always a feature of leading journals, especially while society is holding its court at the sea-side, or at watering-places,) giving an account of some gay party or ball, is witness. Every reader is familiar with the penny-a-liner's detail and fine writing with which the greedy fashionable public, and perhaps a still more numerous public not initiated, and green with envy of the fashionable public—very green—is informed how the elegant Mrs. A—— was dressed, and what length of trail she drew—how many thousand dollars in diamonds flashed like fireflies out of the darkness from the raven tresses of Mrs. B——'s hair, and so on to the end of the alphabet. What does not thus obtain the prize of newspaper publicity, nevertheless forms the staple of private correspondence and buzzes about in ladies' small talk,

until attention is absorbed again in still more extravagant preparation for the next magnificent affair.

'Society' has its 'Court Gazette' in our republican metropolis, in which the student of our social manners may read every week *ad nauseam*, the story of life as it is lived in the gay world at home. He must be prepared not to gasp with rustic amazement if he lights upon a whole column of extremely personal gossip, studded thick with names printed outright, in honest letters unashamed, of ladies that have had the good luck to deserve such mention by a ball-dress particularly suited to their style of beauty, or by a morning toilette, gracefully harmonized with their figure and gait on the street. Guess, if you can, the vanity that is eating out the heart of a society where such things have become common. Is it not edifying to read, as quite lately one could do, in this very newspaper, a solemn prophet-warning to New York about out-Paris-ing Paris?

It may be said that these excesses, which nobody will deny, are not confined to the occasion

of the dance. And it must be admitted that in truth they are not. They are equally incident to every so-called amusement that consists mainly in making up a *spectacle*. The opera, and sometimes the theatre, the theatre now-a-days more and more I believe, are close of kin to the dance in the respects enumerated. I hold that in the comparatively sordid interest of economy even, how much more in the interest of simplicity and virtue in public manners, such forms of amusement should be sternly discountenanced. When Fashion shall miss her chance of holding her gay and heartless court in the ball-room and opera-house—then we may hope to see Christian women free enough from a tyranny whose prying and ubiquitous pettiness might have given to Philip II. of Spain his favorite idea of kingship—free enough, I say, to go to God's house on the Sabbath, without having their ejaculatory prayers on the way disturbed by a persistent accompaniment of misgivings as to whether the bonnets they are compelled to wear, from the preceding season, are not "perfect frights," because, forsooth, a

trifle less exquisitely ridiculous than those of the style which has just superseded them! I may be wrong, but it seems to me that the dance, being formed upon the idea of a spectacle, and converting especially every lady participant in it into an object to be gazed at, and to court admiration, as the joint *chef d'œuvre* of the milliner, of the jeweller, and of the hairdresser—it might be unfair not to add also of the dancing-master—the dance being thus essentially for the exhibition of the woman as a thing rather than as a person, as a miracle of decorated exterior, rather than as the heiress of a priceless heart, and of a beautiful and beautified mind—the dance being such has largely contributed to the creation of that meretricious taste in dress which seriously threatens, through its direct and indirect economic influence, to corrupt and deteriorate the very basis of our American society. True it is that the comparatively unpretending and innocent dancing parties, which take place in less utterly frivolous circles of society, stop far short of the monstrous extremes that I have described. But the tendency is

one. All rivers run to the sea. These smaller assemblies are feeders to the larger. And the law issues from the ball-room to the private parlor, just as to private theatricals the law descends from the more elaborate scenic display of the theatre.

III. I am, in the third place, to estimate the effect of the dance upon the development of the Social Nature.

The dance is customarily spoken of as a *social* amusement. If society consists in mere congregation of human persons, then the dance may perhaps substantiate its claim to be a social amusement. But if, on the contrary, the social life of mankind consists rather in the contact of soul with soul, and in commerce of mutual thought, and feeling, and experience, then I maintain that the dance is not only not properly social, but is irreconcilably opposed to society. I think that the distinction should be remembered and recognized in our selection of words. It is an abuse of language to call a herding together of people moving about, no matter with how much rhythmic and kaleido-

scopic grace, to music, an exemplification of human social life. If we needs must have a stock epithet to characterize the thing, better call the dance a *gregarious* amusement, and leave the nobler adjective for consecration to a form of human intercourse in which speech plays some part to distinguish it from the massing together of a jostling crowd of mute or merely gibbering animals.

Am I unfair to the dance? No doubt the view of it which I am presenting may be novel to those easily contented, because unreflecting, minds who willingly resign themselves to be cheated with the jugglery of words. Because it is the fashion to class the dance among the social entertainments, most persons passively let it go under that disguise. But strip off the epithet that belies it, and scan it once in its nakedness, and if it does not appear as grim a sham, for an exercise of the social nature, as ever imposed upon intelligent men and women —why then I must confess myself to have misconceived the truth concerning what social enjoyment for the human race should be.

Not long ago, at a dancing party, it was remarked by a lady, herself I believe a participant in the exercise, to a person of my acquaintance, "I wish there were not so much dancing as there is; it seems impossible to get acquainted with each other!" That woman at least had got a peep, probably without knowing it, under the impudent mask which still, to the most, makes the dance seem a social amusement.

No wonder the dance is patronized, as it is, by diplomatists and politicians. Not all have Talleyrand's art to realize his definition of the use of language and conceal their thoughts by words.* And since it is necessary so often, for public and political purposes, that thoughts should be concealed, how invaluable a device for

* A friend, learned in such curious points, has shown me a passage in Goldsmith's prose where the fine phrase traditionally ascribed to the Frenchman, seems almost to have been anticipated. But Voltaire's proud boast, that when the Almighty wished a thought to make the circuit of the world, he kindled it in the heart of a Frenchman, has here its humble fulfillment; for this *mot*, barbed as it is, with the fitness in it to Talleyrand's character, has found a currency in the mouths of men which hardly any other authorship supposable could have given it.

statesmen is an institution like the dance, which shall enable them to gratify society by condescending to be social, without running the risk of saying more than a dozen consecutive words in the course of an evening!

But it is often insisted that the dance is unrivalled for the ease and grace it imparts to the carriage and manners, thus at least removing the friction with which the want of external polish hinders the pleasurable interflow of individuals in society. I indulge my private guess of at least one Christian man, no louger conspicuous even in his own denominational circles, who, transferred for a time by Providence from the pastor's personal wrestle with the foes which beleaguer youth to a sphere of less publicity, where large and liberal views of worldly conformity were easier to entertain, capitulated to this temptation, and suffered his children to go where the dancing master might soften the natural angularity of their movements into the flowing curves said to approximate more nearly to the ideal of perfect grace. Alas, alas! Does not even the poet teach the Christian teacher a deeper lesson than that?

> For manners are not idle, but the fruit
> Of loyal nature, and of noble mind.

If such hirelings as Christian parents are able to secure to teach, in the capacity of dancing-master, elegant manners to their children, can in the course of a few afternoons or evenings impart to them a life-long effect of improvement, what might not be hoped for, if the home itself were made a school of grace and courtesy, in which the heart should be taught to tone the voice, and light the eye, and mould the mien, and modulate all to the rhythmical mood of undissimulated love? Who has ever compared the Peter that obtrudes his uncouth figure in glimpses here and there through the gospels, with the Peter that afterwards betrays so ineffable a grace of high-bred courtesy in his epistles—who has ever considered the transformation that had passed upon this man in the school of Christ, making the Galilean the cosmopolite, the fisherman the gentleman,—who has done this and not perceived that the last accomplishment of the manners is elsewhere to be sought than at the hands of M. Martinet, the dancing-master?

While something, nevertheless, may in fairness be conceded here to the dance, a very little observation accompanied with a very little reflection will, I think, suffice to convince a candid mind that the institution is hardly all, even in this respect, that is claimed for it by its more enthusiastic, and especially its professional, devotees. It is certainly a service to the social interests of men, if the dance does help to create that unselfishness between person and person, which morality enjoins upon us all as politeness, or even to create that affectation of this, which we are all of us so well content to accept instead of politeness. This is the element in which mutual intercourse must be transacted, if it is to be a source either of pleasure or of profit. I would be the last to deny the debt, if the dance can show that it does indeed supply such a neutral condition of lubricity to the agreeable mingling of people in society, *without* at the same time overbalancing its credit with deductions chargeable on this very score.

What is the true state of the case? There is, to my mind, something fairly august in the

arrogant self-assertion of the dance. It awes one—it takes away one's breath—one is uncertain for a moment or two in its presence whether his first principles of courtesy and good breeding may not, by some hocus-pocus, have got exactly reversed without his being aware of it. This social amusement flouts you with such utterly pitiless, such Gorgonizing insolence,

Staring right on with calm, eternal eyes,

—if you happen to get into its way! Until you recover your self-possession, you rather believe that it must mysteriously be in accordance with everlasting principles of politeness that you should be flouted. You are in the unenviable condition of that morbidly modest man, whom Robert Hall describes as seeming by his manner to be asking pardon of everybody for taking the liberty to exist. I have seen a good many people who never rally from this uncomfortable hallucination in the presence of the dance. The dance plants one foot of its unlimitedly expansible compasses in a parlor, and thence widening its sweep, room by room, gradually and serenely encircles the entire area of

the house that is open to guests. Happy then the mortals who do not dance, if they can find a secure retreat in hall or entry. Those who shrink into corners, and those who desperately cling to the walls, shall not escape a whisk of the tumultuous dress, or a thrust of the importunate elbow, to disturb the serenity of their meditations on the graceful elegance of this extremely social amusement. That grave Chinaman, who gazed with the well-schooled wonder of a Celestial on the spectacle of the dance as exhibited by a company of Europeans, betrayed his innocent ignorance of the real fascination of the thing, but he certainly discovered its utter hollowness, regarded merely as a social enjoyment, when he asked, "Pray, why do you not let your servants do that for you!" Is the fact that the dance lubricates the individual manners, or that its introduction breaks the ice of first reserve which embarrasses the freedom of an evening's company;—giving conversation forsooth such an *élan* that it is dispensed with from that moment forward—is this two-fold fact, admitted, a fair offset to the gross, the

egregious ill-manners upon which I have commented? It must be added that provident and resourceful hostesses guard against such abuse of their hospitality by assigning one side of the house to those who trip it as they go, and the other to those who prefer to preserve postures of stable equilibrium—that is to say, by virtually making two parties at once.

I remember hearing the celebrated M. Bautain, in one of his lectures at the Sorbonne on some subject of theology, going aside from his main discussion, lament the decline in France of the art of conversation. *Bon vivant* that he appeared in his redundant *physique*, it was almost whimsical to hear him attribute the misfortune to the habit of after-dinner smoking—a habit against which nothing about the lecturer himself seemed to protest along with his words, except his interdictory quality of Romish ecclesiastic. He thought that the post-prandial cigar, banishing men from the influence supposed to rain from ladies' eyes at jousts of wit as well as of arms, and enveloping them in a haze of oblivious torpor—had chilled the genial

currents of that conversational enthusiasm which once made the table-talk of Frenchmen the admiration of cultivated Europe.

Now it may well be that what might be called the high art of conversation, such, for example, as created the nurturing atmosphere for a production like the *Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*, is not materially injured by the dance: for however much the literary magicians may patronize the exercise as a matter of æsthetics, or approve it as a matter of morals, they can hardly be imagined very sedulous devotees of it as a matter of practice: but assuredly, had M. Bautain spoken from the point of view of average American society, he would have been nearer the truth in representing conversation, as a diffused and popular accomplishment, to be in danger of extinction from the usurping dominion of the dance.

IV. I have now, in immediate sequence to the foregoing, to investigate the influence of the dance on the Intellectual Improvement of Society.

Our American life is, from the virtual compulsion of circumstances, so much absorbed in attention to material interests that as a people we have little time, at the best, to devote to the interior culture of ourselves. Literature and art, books, pictures, and the other various objects of elegant taste, these truly rational topics of interest to enlightened minds, have the very narrowest chance, even with earnest intentions on our part, to produce their elevating and chastening effect upon our lives. Is it not shame to us that the golden hours, all too few, in which we might exchange with each other the thoughts inspired by themes like these, to our mutual profiting, should be recklessly squandered upon a laborious bodily exercise, in which monkeys might be trained to display greater agility than we, and bears a statelier gravity?

What a confession for our young men and young women to make that they find it impossible to get an evening's company to go off well without the dance! How much mental vacuity —what aching and echoing cranial room for knowledge—does such a confession imply!

Oh, young men! Oh, young women! American brothers and sisters, say,—would it not be better if you should create and sustain courses of lectures for some of your winter evenings—if you should patronize the circulating libraries, or even the book-stores—if you should subscribe to some of the literary periodicals (but you will have to wait now until you *become* a public fit to support them, before you can find many very good at home)—if you should organize reading-clubs, and amateur art associations—in short, if you should spend a share at least of the time and of the money that you can command, in acquiring such resources of mind, that you would not be obliged to whirl each other off into a dance when you assemble for an evening together, lest forsooth you should not be able to think of anything to say, to relieve the awkardness of silence? I am met with, "Better to dance than to talk and slander your neighbors?" True, but so perhaps it is better to steal than to commit murder. But those who refrain from stealing are not therefore obliged to commit murder. And those

who refrain from dancing are not obliged to slander their neighbors. There is conversation which neither abuses the absent, nor yet injures the participants in it. But the art of such conversation is indeed far gone towards being lost to a generation that will frisk, like Donatello, and fly into the dance, to dodge a fair and friendly encounter of mind with mind.

I am aware that it may be replied: "What we want is amusement. The mental activity you are recommending is not recreation." A sound philosophy of recreation would require, that those portions of our complex organism which are wearied should be permitted to rest, while, on the other hand, those which have been left comparatively unemployed should at the same time be brought into play. Now how many of our young people in ordinary society, exert their minds so strenuously, that their health demands a period of mental repose? By all means let such relax the excessive strain. But assuredly those who find it out of the question to make an evening's entertainment pass off respectably without introducing the dance

to take the place of conversation, will not claim to be of the number. No; the people who compose society are rather, if they but knew it, fairly tired to death with everlasting amusement. It is their business to seek pleasure, and no merchant pushes his traffic harder. It would be positive recreation to these devotees of society, if they would set themselves at some work that should bring their languishing minds into action. And then the clerks, for example, who are on their feet all day, in a confined atmosphere—is it not too severe a jocularity to call it recreation, for these leg-weary mortals to dance most of the night, as if their hope of usefulness depended upon their assiduity in it? Is it not clear that what such young men need for diversion, is something to employ their minds, on matters aside from business, while their tired muscular system refreshes itself with rest? Due mental exercise is perhaps as essential to health as is exercise of the body.

But I have said enough on these minor topics of my discussion. The chief topic still remains to be discussed. I have expressed my-

self with severity; but my readers will surely suffer me to be a little out of humor with a usurpation, which tyrannizes to such disastrous purpose, over so fair a realm of human life.

V. I come finally to the consideration of the dance in its moral aspects. I use the word "moral," without designing to distinguish it from "religious." I am of the number of those who believe that morality, rightly conceived of, is the same thing as religion, rightly conceived of. If the dance then is consistent with pure morality, it is also consistent with true religion. If it is a proper amusement for the world, it is equally a proper amusement for the church. If it is morally suitable for the irreligious young man who hears a sermon, to dance, it is likewise morally suitable for the minister who preaches the sermon, to dance at his side. The question remains now to be considered, *Is* the dance justifiable on moral grounds?

When the dance is accused, as I have accused it, of being injurious to the health, of breeding extravagance in expenditure, of hindering social enjoyment and profit, and of dissipating

the opportunities of intellectual improvement, the rejoinder is commonly made that at least it is in itself an innocent, if not a useful way of spending the evening hours. "Besides it is delightful," say enthusiastic young ladies. "We take no note of time, when we dance, and are conscious of no fatigue. The music moves us almost without our effort. It is actually easier to dance, when the fiddle is going, than it is to keep still." Well, if this be so, useless as it seems in a utilitarian point of view, and fatal to self-culture, still, if it be so indescribably delightful, and at the same time *not positively injurious to good morals*, why I, for my part, say, By all means dance and have a fine time. Pity—pity, to be sure, that you have not wholesome earnestness enough, in some worthy direction, to make the frivolity distasteful; but if you have not, then there is probably nothing better for you, than to resemble those natives on the coast of Africa, of whom it is related that they begged their musical European visitor to cease fiddling, lest they perforce danced themselves to death. But *is* the dance morally unobjectionable?

I have, it is true, in part forstalled my reply. For it would be strictly legitimate to enlarge on the vicious tendencies always engendered by such extravagant expenditure as the dance encourages, and almost requires, upon the sordid ambition it inspires to outshine one's social peers, and the low pride begotten by success among those victorious in this barbaric rivalry, with the consequent chagrin, and heart-burning, and secret jealousy, that follow in the breasts of the disappointed, upon its deplorable effect in bounding the personal aspiration to exterior elegance in looks, and dress, and manners—it would be legitimate, I say, in settling the moral propriety of the usage in question, to dwell on these things, and I might use unstinted freedom of language respecting them. But serious as they are, they by no means constitute the *gravamen* of the indictment which I bring against the dance as enemy to public morality. There are graver moral considerations still, involved in the subject, to which I desire my readers to give their thoughtful attention. These considerations, however, are such, that

though they move my feeling to the highest pitch of moral indignation, I nevertheless must pick my expressions with the utmost care, lest I offend the decorum which the chaste spirit of Christian refinement has taught us to observe and to demand in speech. There is an infinite slough of pollution, but scantily crusted over, under your feet now, whichever way you turn.

Incedis per ignes
Suppositos cineri doloso.

Alas, that the fatal *faux pas*, which lets the adventurer down, is so much more frequently taken in the actual experience of life, than in terms of allusion by speech!

The dance, then, to say it at once, and plainly, is an immoral amusement, immoral I mean in itself. Of course I am not now traversing the statement with which I set out, that dancing in itself is perfectly innocent. This I assert again. But I must remind my readers that dancing in itself is not under discussion. I am dealing with a very different affair indeed —a concrete thing, a substance *with accidents*,

say rather a substance whose essence consists in its accidents—a social institution, well-determined in form, and hitherto as persistent as force—or as sin—I am dealing with THE DANCE. Now dancing does certainly occur in the dance—but so does breathing; and one comes just as near constituting the dance as the other.

I shall seem paradoxical to many, and I will explain. In a single word, dancing is one thing and the dance is another. The dance is dancing under certain conditions well understood. The dance, by reason of these constant conditions, is an amusement immoral in itself. Dancing is an exercise which may be perfectly harmless. I should have no objection in the world to a dance in which the only participants were children too young to be conscious of sex, and necessarily incapable of any pleasure in it, except that of associated and rhythmical motion. Boys and girls might knit hands and beat the ground together in it to their hearts' content, just as they might romp together in field or wood. (As a point of hygiene, and of æsthetic even, I should generally insist that it be

the *ground* they beat, and not a floor, much less a carpeted floor.) I should have no objection to a dance in which the participants were exclusively males, of whatever age, or to one in which the participants were exclusively females, of whatever age. I should have no objection to a dance in which the participation was confined to the brothers and sisters of one household, and the parents and grandparents, for that matter, if they liked, might join in it with the utmost propriety. This style of "parlor dancing" I would cheerfully permit if I were the Solon of society. But I should be Draconian enough to exclude neighbors' children, intimate friends and cousins of every degree—as long at least as human nature continues such that these marry and are given in marriage with each other. These might, to be sure, be present and witness the Terpsichorean performances of the family; but I am afraid that the mere spectacle of such domestic felicity would be voted a rather tame entertainment. In fact, such is human depravity, I have my misgivings that the older brothers and sisters of the household

would almost as lief go back to their Sunday-school as to engage in so entirely innocent a diversion.

Upon condition that the prevailing moral tone of society were such as to keep the dance strictly within these limits, I would enter into bonds to be the very last to wag a tongue against it. I seriously suspect, however, that this "peculiar institution" of society, so circumscribed, would follow a late notable example and refuse to survive its indignation at the insult.

It would be the extreme of narrowness not to admit, as I cheerfully do, that the limits thus laid down for the perfectly safe circumscription of the dance, might be enlarged a little now and then without serious risk. I have seen companies assembled much more promiscuous in their composition than those described above, in which I veritably think, nevertheless, that the evil likely to arise from a brief indulgence in the dance would be quite infinitesimal in amount. But this admission, made in the utmost good faith, really concedes nothing of any

practical value. The trouble is, that beyond these limits a vigilant discrimination of persons proper to be included would be necessary. This discrimination would be extremely difficult often in thought, and it would be infinitely delicato in fact. Besides, there is nobody to make the discrimination. It would involve on many occasions the exercise of a very invidious censorship over the moral character of your neighbors and acquaintances—a censorship so invidious that it would never be undertaken. Suppose, for instance, your family, enlivened by the casual dropping in of the neighbor next door on one side, an unexceptionable man, happened to be chasing the glowing hours of an evening with flying feet. The "parlor dancing," often so stoutly contended for, is usually described as springing up spontaneously in some such unceremonious way. So far I acknowledge the harm is purely theoretical—probably. But while this is in progress, the neighbor next door on the other side calls too, in no wise conscious of the music and dancing, but led simply by a spirit in his feet. Everybody knows that next-

door neighbors are always the best of neighbors, but, unhappily, not always the most irreproachable of men. This second caller is not beyond reproach. But that does not prevent his being fond of the dance, and being, moreover, a very graceful dancer. What is to be done? Shall the dance stop? But if it does not, where is your principle of discrimination? It is an impossible discrimination, or so difficult that if faithfully applied, the dance would soon die a natural death. It would not seem worth the trouble of keeping it alive. I desire, however, to make it distinctly understood, that to such hypothetical cases of dancing as have thus been described, the severe language which will follow, both in the text and in the notes, is not intended to apply.

But at this point some one, beginning reluctantly to feel the truth of my remarks, demurs, "What new asceticism have we here? The principle you imply would separate the sexes equally, in every other species of social intercourse. If mutual consciousness of sex is the circumstance which makes it immoral for men

and women to dance with each other, then how is it not also immoral for them ever to talk with each other, since this troublesome consciousness is likely at any moment to intervene between them? Is it not rather the rational, and pre-eminently the Christian, philosophy of the relation of man and woman that they should recognize and enjoy the exquisite sense of difference, put from the beginning between them to create the possibility of that transcendent affection whose

> dearest bond is this,
> Not like to like, but like in difference.

Is not this the common sense of the subject?

I certainly think that it is. And it is precisely because I would guard this most delicate bloom of all human delight from the gross and common handling which soils its purity, that I use the language I do. Can we forget that it is the best use which is liable to the worst abuse? Do we not know that the relation of the sexes, which was to have overflowed the world as a fountain of Paradise, has been perverted into the prolific cause of more crime and misery

than any other single thing that can be named? And shall I not cry shame upon a usage that, under cover of respectability, regularly titillates and tantalizes an animal appetite as insatiable as hunger, more cruel than revenge?

My accusation is that the dance, instead of affording an opportunity for mutually ennobling companionship between man and woman, inspired with a chaste and sweet interfused remembrance of their contrasted relationship to each other—that the dance, instead of this, consists substantially of a system of means contrived with more than human ingenuity to excite the instincts of sex to action, however subtle and disguised at the moment, in its sequel the most bestial and degrading. I charge that here, and not elsewhere, in the anatomy of that elusive fascination which belongs so peculiarly to the dance, the scalpel is laid upon the quivering secret of life. Passion—passion transformed if you please never so much, subsisting in no matter how many finely contrasted degrees of sensuality—passion, and nothing else is the true basis of the popularity of the dance.

I shrink almost uncontrollably from this statement, now that I have made it; and many times since I first assumed so bold a position I have been tempted to recede from it, overborne by the arguments, and still more by the sweet personal magnetism of friends of my own sex whose fortunate individual exemption from infirmity disqualifies them from allowing that my views are other than Puritanic, or at least morally "dyspeptic." It is not pleasant to be a voice crying in the wilderness. Still less is it pleasant to be sent to Nineveh on an errand of Jonah. I am so far influenced as to admit that there must be numerous instances of exception to the general rule. But the general rule, and not the exceptions, should determine our line of conduct. It is a case so peculiar that the exceptions cannot safely be admitted even to exercise an influence in determining our line of conduct. On the other hand, too, I think it right to say that since the first publication of my views, I have received volunteer testimony from so many quarters, and from quarters representing such diametric diversity of moral and social charac-

ter and position, corroborative of them *from experience*, that I find it impossible to qualify them now by a single degree. One man in particular, my acquaintance with whom, commenced in the earliest boyhood, and uninterrupted since, permits an unreserve of expression between us such as is seldom incident to later-formed acquaintanceship, has emphatically confessed to me his wonder that a person who never danced himself should have been able so plainly and fully to tell the truth about dancing. And no man knows what the whole of the truth about it is better than he. Nor let it be supposed that I commit so vulgar an error as that of attaching undue weight to the testimony of one likely to have projected his own moral character upon the innocent companionship of his guilty pleasure. If it were proper to do so, even in this anonymous way, I could cite an equally striking corroborative expression, conveyed to me through an unquestionable medium, from one whom I never met, but who, *at every point*, save common experience in dancing, is in the most antipodal contrast to the witness

just mentioned. I am forced to conclude that the devotees of the dance differ among themselves, not so much in the influence received from participation in it as in their intelligent consciousness of that influence.

It is no accident that the dance is what it is. It mingles the sexes in such closeness of personal approach and contact as, outside of the dance, is nowhere tolerated in respectable society. It does this under a complexity of circumstances that conspire to heighten the impropriety of it. It is evening and the hour is late, there is the delicious and unconscious intoxication of music and motion in the blood, there is the strange, confusing sense of being individually unobserved among so many, while yet the natural "noble shame," which guards the purity of man and woman alone together, is absent—such is the occasion, and still, hour after hour, the dance whirls its giddy kaleidoscope around, bringing hearts so near that they almost beat against each other, mixing the warm, mutual breaths, darting the fine personal electricity across between the meeting fingers, flushing the

face and lighting the eyes with a quick language, subject often to gross interpretations on the part of the vile-hearted—why, this fashionable institution seems to me to have been invented in an unfriendly quarter, usually conceived of as situated under us, to give our human passions leave to disport themselves, unreproved by conscience, by reason, or by shame, almost at their will. I will not trust myself to speak of this further. My indignation waxes hotter than can well be controlled. I even seem to myself to have contracted some soil from having merely described truthfully what thousands of fellow-Christians, ignorant of themselves, practice without swallowing a qualm!*

* With the sincerest reluctance, I bring myself to subjoin a remark bearing on this point, once overheard on cardboard by a friend of mine, in a conversation that was passing between two young men about their lady acquaintances. The horrible concreteness of the fellow's expression may give a wholesome recoil from their danger to some minds that would be little affected by a speculative statement of the same idea. Said one: "I would not give a straw to dance with Miss ——. You can't excite any more passion in her than you can in a stick of wood!"

I say that the dance is not fortuitously such. It is such essentially. Its real nature is shown by what it constantly tends to become, in new figures, introduced stealthily, from time to time, (under silent protest from many who suffer their modesty to be overborne by the fear of being charged with prudery) a little more doubtful than the old, and in wanton whirls, like the waltz and the polka. Always the dance inclines to multiply opportunities of physical proximity

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Pure young women of a warmer temperament, that innocently abandon themselves to enthusiastic proclamations of their delight in the dance in the presence of gentlemen, should but barely once have a male intuition of the meaning of the involuntary glance that will often shoot across from eye to eye among their auditors. Or they should overhear the comments exchanged among them afterwards. For when young men meet after an evening of the dance to talk it over together, it is not points of dress they discuss. Their only demand, and it is generally conceded, is that ladies' dress shall not needlessly embarrass suggestion. Believe me, however women escape without the smell of fire upon their garments, men often do not get out of the furnace, save with a flame devouring them, that they seek strange fountains, and willingly damn their souls, to quench.

It tasks a resolutely firm nerve to speak thus of things that braze it out before the world and the church, only for want of being thus spoken of.

and contact between the sexes, always to make them more prolonged and more daring. In fine, the dance adds that last ingredient of perfect bliss, whose absence the witty Frenchwoman bethought herself, in the midst of some innocent enjoyment, to mourn—with a pathos more pathetic than they dream who see nothing but a whimsical humor in the saying—"*Mon Dieu!* how delightful this is! It would be quite perfect, if there were only a little *sin* in it."

But if what has already been said and suggested fails to convince any that my analysis of the pleasure of the dance is true, I have a little problem to propose for their solution: *Why is it that the dance alone, of all the favorite diversions of gay society, requires the association of the two sexes in it?* The problem is not solved by the ready reply, "Why, the pleasure of social intercourse is always heightened when both sexes participate in it. We enjoy an evening of cards the better for this piquant commingling!" But you have missed the point of the problem. The question is not,

Why do you enjoy the dance *more* when men and women execute it together? but, Why must men and women execute it together in order that they should enjoy it *at all?* No doubt a game of cards may be much more bewitching, while not an iota more hurtful, for the meeting of the sexes at the table. But then cheaply figured parallelograms of paste-board have charms for their devotees of either sex, which enable them to dispense with the society of the other. Men, young and old, often sit the night out in bachelor conviviality around a card-table. Young ladies, and sometimes their mammas with them, I believe, will interminably shuffle and deal far on into the hours affectionately called "small" by those who know how to make them seem so with revel—all quite without the company of gentlemen. But come to the dance—and what a difference! Where do young ladies keep up their practice of calisthenics after leaving boarding-school? What bachelor club exists anywhere that devotes an evening to the dance among its members? Pensive and imaginative young ladies might possibly, here and

there, of a lonesome evening, seek to revive a diluted illusion of past pleasure, by a few strictly maiden measures executed with soon exhausted enthusiasm, but men with men—hardly! —unless perhaps in broad farce to point a whimsical contrast. With reference to such a style of dancing at least, the pagan sarcasm of Cicero is likely long to retain a Christian application—*Nemo fere saltat sobrius, nisi forte insanit.*

The characteristic thus established as belonging to the dance, in distinction from every other form of popular amusement, is full of instructive implication to those who are accustomed to inquire for the causes of things. Of course I know how indignantly the accusation of impurity in their enjoyment of the dance will be repelled by the great majority of its votaries. And I am very ready to admit the indignation as entirely honest; for I have no doubt that the element of unchastity in it, rarely absent in some more or less refined quality of influence, I most certainly believe, is yet generally unrecognized by the subject. If only unconscious-

ness of evil influence were a trustworthy prophylactic against it! Once again, and for all, I protest with the utmost sincerity that I am far from confounding the devotees of the dance in an indiscriminate accusation of conscious impurity. I know too many pure-hearted women among dancers, whom no fortunate son, or brother, or husband, could possibly charge with one doubtful thought, for even an instant of the most oblivious excitement, not to be myself indignant in purging my intention of any such cruel injustice. And in the opposite sex, too, however much more exposed by nature to temptation, there are some dancers no doubt who come very near to escaping the conscious contagion of evil, by virtue of an instinctive chastity in them, God's gift to a few. But, right on the heels of so wide a disclaimer, I must re-assert my conviction that unconsciousness does not defend even the purest minds from something of the insinuating sensual tendency of this inherently voluptuous amusement.

And then consider, ye Christian fathers, and brothers, and husbands, to what horrible haz-

ards of contact the opportunities of the dance expose your daughters, and sisters, and wives. For who, that has gained any experience of the world, is ignorant of the fact that hardly once does a considerable party assemble, even in the most respectable society, without including some man whom his associates know to be a libertine at heart, if not in life? To think of pure women pastured on, with palms of pollution, and with imminent eyes of adultery, by such a bull of Bashan, the evening long, in the promiscuous *corral* of the dance! What better facilities could be imagined for an accomplished voluptuary to compass the capture of his prey!*

* We shall never lose the impression made years ago upon our mind, in the chances of western travel by packet on the canal, by hearing a practised libertine relate his experience in the arts of female seduction. His master secret lay, as he said with horrid complacency, in accustoming his quarry to the touch of his hands, and especially to the shock of being *kissed*. In this way, to use his own brutal expression, he "*tamed*" the selected victims of his villany.

This article may possibly penetrate to some secluded nook in the country where a superstitious horror, once religious, still bears sway against the dance, while yet a

Faugh! In the ordinary occasions of society, a lady may let her sacred intuitions have some play to guard her against the access of impurity in the uniform of a gentleman. But it is the boast of the dance that it is a democrat and a leveller, permitting no individual caprice to break the circuit of universal equality. You may shudder to your heart's core at the contact that is coming—but the dance leaves you no election—you must take it when it comes. Blush, blush henceforth ye Christian women, when you are invited to submit your persons to the uses of a diversion that may at any time choose to bring you finger-tip to finger-tip with those whose touch is pollution, or, it may be, encircle you in their arms! A burning blush of speechless shame were the best reply to the insult of such an invitation. But I plead against an advocate more eloquent than any individual's words. Oh, Fashion! Fashion! What

variety of "*kissing*" plays are practised in its stead. In a case of social demoralization like this, we could imagine how the dance might serve a really useful turn, if introduced as a temporary stage of progress towards ultimate more thorough reform!

power hast thou to browbeat holy nature, so that she dares not speak to assert her sacred claims against thy imperious sway!

I abruptly dispatch this hateful subject without completing the discussion of it. If my readers have winced at the exceptional plainness of speech which I have used, I beg them to believe that it has cost me sincere pangs of resolution to use it. But I have written under duress of conscience that did not suffer me to shrink. The engineering skill of the devil has defended the dance with a masterly dilemma that leaves open barely two alternatives of attack about equally ineligible. You may either exhaust your strength in demonstrating the minor and incidental evils of the usage, in which case you win an easy, but also a barren victory; or you must freely encounter the peril of damaging your own fair fame for purity, and deliver your blow full at its inherent and essential immorality. The author has deliberately chosen the latter alternative. He can trust the honest heat of indignation that has warmed his words to take away the offence of their ex-

treme fidelity. As for the risk of being charged with bringing the impurity that he finds—he contentedly accepts it. It is a charge that two classes of persons certainly will not prefer. These two classess are, first, those who know him, and secondly, those who know themselves.

THE END.